

SCHWEITZER: ENERGY CONSERVATION IS COMMUNITY EFFORT

By Walt Williams

Gov. Brian Schweitzer told a group of business people Thursday that if they could help make energy conservation "cool," then that would be a significant step for weaning the nation off foreign oil and fighting global warming.

"If we simply stated that this is one of the most important things that we do, then we will be successful," he said.

Schweitzer spoke to recipients of this year's EcoStar awards, which are given to businesses and organizations that have taken steps to reduce their pollution output or encourage environmentally friendly practices.

The governor was 90 minutes late for the ceremony because he was coming from a memorial service for a Miles City soldier who had been killed in Iraq.

Schweitzer said every funeral gives Montanans an opportunity to reflect on the sacrifice of military personnel, but also reaffirmed what he called his own commitment for energy independence so the nation wouldn't be reliant on "dictators" for its oil.

Many people say they want to fight global warming, but it's really smaller, everyday actions that will make a difference, Schweitzer said. That could be cutting back on the amount of gas a person uses, or eating food produced locally instead of being shipped in from far way.

"Collectively, if each and every one of us pulled the rope just a little bit, then it starts to move," he said. "Are you ready to pull the rope a little bit more? That's going to change to world."

He also said people could make conservation cool by challenging themselves and others to use less energy. Instead of talking about sports or movies, people could talk about what they've done in the way of conservation.

EcoStar awards are distributed by Montana State University Extension service, using grant money from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This is the eighth year the awards were handed out.

The ceremony was held at the Bozeman Public Library, itself a recipient because the new library was the first public building in the state to receive Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certification. Thirty businesses and organizations, including several from the Bozeman area, were given awards.

Among the local recipients was Pure & Simple, Inc., of Belgrade, a company that provides ecologically safe interior and exterior painting services.

Using environmentally friendly paints isn't much more expensive than using traditional paints, company owner Tom Baldwin said.

"People are real receptive" to the idea, he said. "A little education goes a long ways."

Another local recipient was the Kenyon Noble Lumber Company, which, among other things, has started using low-energy lighting at its Belgrade store and offers information for customers about how they can conserve energy and save money at the same time, company spokeswoman Cathy Starita said.

"Everybody's mind is just not on conservation, but on saving money as well," she said.

Other local EcoStar award recipients include Blanchford Landscape Contractors, Inc.; the Community Co-op; Delaware North Companies Parks & Resorts; Eco-terric; Ideal Bite, Inc.; Lindquist Craftsmanship; the Mackenzie River Pizza Company; the Montana Outdoor Science School; Mountain Home-Montana Vacation Rentals; OASIS Environmental, Inc.; the Streamline Transit System; and V2 Design.